



Berkshire County Commission on the Status of Women

BCCSW Vision: To be an effective, inclusive voice and vehicle for action
for all women and girls of Berkshire County

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

Mission

The purpose of the Commission shall be to advance women toward full equity in all areas of life and to promote rights and opportunities for all women. The mission of the Berkshire County Commission on the Status of Women (BCCSW) is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women across Berkshire County that facilitates and fosters community and inclusiveness among women. The Commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights and the full enjoyment of life for all women throughout their lives.

Commissioners

Mary Berle, Secretary (*Stockbridge, MA*); Gillette Conner, Chair (*Housatonic MA*); Margaret Bradley Davis, Co-Chair (*New Marlborough, MA*); Luci Leonard (*West Stockbridge, MA*); Susan Olshuff, (*Lenox, MA*); Donna Todd Rivers (*Pittsfield, MA*); Gwendolyn VanSant (*Great Barrington, MA*)

BCCSW Focus

In 2017, BCCSW revisited its mission and the goals for engagement and how best to serve Berkshire County, building on the accomplishments and successes of the previous years. We were operating with a complement of seven of nine possible Commissioners with the goal to refine and clarify our mission within the larger political ecosystem and dialogue in which we find ourselves, especially as relates to challenges, topics, legislation, etc that affect women and girls.

Resulting from a particularly substantial dialogue in November with our outgoing Senator, Ben Downing, the Commissioners unanimously felt that we could play a role in facilitating and supporting civil discourse and in particular, putting a focus on increasing civic engagement. The issues and topics affecting women and girls are diverse and interwoven and the Commission feels that we can play a role in providing a platform and place for bringing topic experts, concerned citizens and policy makers together to explore the complexities and possible solutions to some of these issues in Berkshire County.

Legislative Breakfast

BCCSW hosted its annual legislative breakfast at Berkshire Community College on Monday, March 27th (agenda and save the date postcard attached). With the title "Inspire. Learn. Do.",

we wanted to create an interactive gathering where participants would then commit to undertaking at least one action after leaving the breakfast. We were honored to have Tahirah Amatul-Wadud, Attorney and Commissioner for the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, as our inspirational speaker. We then kicked off the interactive portion of the breakfast by sharing the 7 Norms of Collaboration, a tool that all participants could use to facilitate and engage in civic discourse and that could be practiced for the discussions at the tables as well.

Following the introduction of this tool, there were then concurrent table discussions covering three topics: Violence Against Women, Reproductive Health and Access, and Civic Engagement. These table discussions were facilitated by local citizens with particular expertise in the topic and were joined at several tables by some of our local legislators from the County.

There were over 100 attendees at the event and BCCSW will produce a summary of the table discussions that will be shared and that will also serve to identify topics for further exploration in future events.

Student Intern

The Berkshire Commission was fortunate to host a student intern from Miss Hall's School who contributed to the delivery of the legislative breakfast. Hosted by Multicultural Bridge as the sponsoring agency, she developed tip sheets (attached) on the topics covered at the breakfast providing a national, state and local summary of the status of the topics covered. Meant to spur engagement and not intended as an exhaustive or comprehensive treatment of the topics, these tip sheets were then provided to all participants at the breakfast to provide a brief overview of the issues and resources to explore.

Representation

- 1) BCCSW was invited to participate at the Berkshire County gathering of the Women's March on Washington in January. We hosted a booth where attendees could take an oath to support the Constitution and to affirm their commitment to civic engagement. There were over 1500 people who attended and the Commissioners who attended had the chance to share the role and goals of BCCSW.
- 2) BCCSW was invited to speak as part of one of WAM Theatre's productions in the fall of 2016. With the vision to create opportunity for women and girls through their mission of theatre as philanthropy, the Commission was honored to be invited by WAM Theatre to represent BCCSW.

Goals for 2017-2018

- Establish a fully operational Commission, which will create the stability needed to accomplish our mission and goals
 - Recruit for vacant Commissioner positions
 - Develop an expectations guide for interested candidates (akin to Essex County's efforts in 2015-2016)
- Facilitate ongoing collaboration with the MCSW and learn from the successes of other regional Commissions
- Develop a calendar of focused activities with full participation of all Commissioners

Submitted by Gillette Conner on May 16, 2017